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ABSTRACT

Faced with scarce resources and environmental uncertainty in the past decade, colleges and universities have experimented with different modes of academic staffing, most of which are attempts to preserve or create more flexible policies and practices. In spite of tenure systems in operation at 94% of all four year colleges, institutions have at least four major opportunities to reduce expenditures or to reallocate personnel: (1) position control (the decision to create a position or hire replacements); (2) the decision about the type of appointment to be made; (3) the decision to reduce the rate at which tenure-track faculty receive tenure; and (4) the decision to increase the number of tenured faculty leaving the institution (including post-tenure review). The effectiveness of these four reallocation strategies must be evaluated in terms of the content and impact of budget cuts, the strengths and weaknesses of various devices for reduction and reallocation, and consultation processes. Institutions can become more flexible by adopting in the aggregate of all these practices and policies and matching them with a 3- to 5-year perspective. (LB)

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ERIC DIGEST

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Flexibility in Academic Staffing

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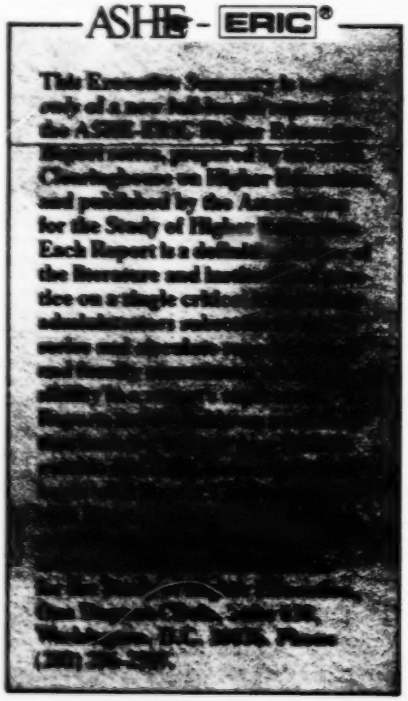

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For the last decade, colleges and universities have been operating in intense conditions of scarce resources and environmental uncertainty. In response, institutions have experimented with more aggressive recruitment of students, redesigned programs to make students more job oriented, expanded development, tightened controls on expenditures, controlled enrollment in high-demand programs, and deferred maintenance on buildings and equipment.

One major result has been almost frantic attempts to experiment with different modes of academic staffing, most of which are attempts to preserve or create more flexible policies and practices. The literature and national conferences of academic administrators are filled with discussions on alternatives to tenure, the proper use of part-time faculty, incentives for early retirement, retraining faculty, and retrenchment.

More flexible strategies should not be used to justify the retrenchment of tenured or tenure-track faculty, however. The retrenchment of tenured faculty should be considered only as a last resort and only by institutions that have been stripped of their budgetary flexibility and lack other options for bringing programs into line with students' needs.

What Staffing Practices Are Being Used?

Although tenure systems are operative in 94 percent of all four-year colleges and universities and about 57 percent of all full-time faculty are tenured, tenure per se is not an insurmountable barrier to increased flexibility. Institutions have at least four major opportunities to reduce expenditures or to reallocate personnel:

1. The decision to create a position or to hire replacements for faculty leaving the institution (position control);
2. The decision about the type of appointment to be made (conversion to a no-tenure system, use of non-tenure tracks, and part-time appointments);
3. The decision to reduce the rate at which tenure-track faculty receive tenure (tenure quotas, extended probationary periods, suspension of the "up-or-out" rule, stricter standards for awarding tenure);
4. The decision to increase the number of tenured faculty leaving the institution (posttenure performance review, incentives for early retirement, retrenchment) or to convert underused tenured faculty to more productive use (faculty retraining programs).

The decision to create or fill a position is an essential ingredient in fiscal—as well as personnel—management. The key issue in managing positions through attrition is establishing a review of vacated positions that considers both institutionwide and departmental needs.

Fixed-term and/or rolling contracts provide an opportunity to achieve greater flexibility in staffing. Little evidence supports the view that such contracts stimulate faculty turnover, however, although they do limit the institution's fiscal commitment to the position to a relatively short period of time.

In the fall of 1981, 65 percent of four-year colleges and universities had full-time faculty on non-tenure-track appointments. These non-tenure-track appointments accounted for 12 percent of all full-time faculty. They allow institutions to hedge their long term support for the position yet encourage faculty members to devote full time to teaching and research.

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Approximately 25 percent of all faculty teaching in four-year colleges and universities are employed part time. The use of part-timers permits institutions to gain important savings, increases the opportunity for institutions to respond to changing student and curricular needs, and provides an important buffer against fluctuations in enrollment.

The tenure quota is one of the more common devices for limiting the number of tenured faculty; almost 30 percent of the institutions in the Project on Reallocation had a quota. The quota is simple to administer, promotes flexibility, tends to encourage selectivity and rigor, and may keep costs down. Some argue, however, that quotas are inequitable, encourage rapid turnover, discourage institutional commitment by the young faculty members, and actually are inflexible and rigid.

The use of longer or extended probationary periods provides the opportunity to defer decisions about tenure. Adopting stricter standards for tenure may keep tenure ratios lower. These two practices are difficult to implement; they are seldom supported by faculty and may in effect have all the strengths and weaknesses of quotas.

Systematic review of tenured faculty occurs in slightly more than half of the four-year colleges and universities. About 3 percent of the 318 institutions in the sample actually use such reviews to terminate tenured faculty.

Institutions may use at least five types of incentives to encourage faculty to retire early: increased benefits; lump-sum payments; enhanced annuities; phased retirement; and continuation of fringe benefits. Less than 30 percent of the institutions have a formal early retirement program. Incentives for early retirement can be a useful tool in a limited number of cases, may have one-time, short-term effects on the composition of a faculty, and are complex to administer equitably.

Of the 16 percent of institutions that reported retrenching faculty, about half cited program closure or reduction and declining enrollments as the reasons. *Bona fide* financial exigency and program closure are legitimate grounds for retrenchment, but the use of program *reduction* as a reason to dismiss tenured faculty is highly controversial.

One of the least used devices for gaining curricular flexibility is retraining faculty through granting paid leaves. Even so, about 17 percent of the institutions are retraining faculty for new or revised assignments. Institutions have few incentives to retrain faculty when sufficient trained faculty already are available in the marketplace.

A faculty flow model can clarify alternatives; it must be easily adaptable to changing circumstances and have the support of top management. To be successful, it must be kept simple. Even successful flow models, however cannot make decisions; they are best used as management and planning *tools* to evaluate personnel and fiscal strategies.

How Effective Are Reallocation Strategies?

The discussion about the effectiveness of the four reallocation strategies clusters arond three topics: the content and impact of budget cuts, the strengths and weaknesses of various devices for reduction and reallocation, and consultation processes.

Budget cuts are felt in both academic and nonacademic areas, and they put great pressure on existing systems of allocating resources and setting priorities. Decremental budgeting systems are very difficult to implement over the years because of political forces on and off campus.

Effective use of the various strategies requires good leadership, a reasonably consistent definition of the problems and opportunities, and realistic expectations as to what is possible. It usually is not reasonable, for example, to expect to save actual dollars by reorganizing or closing programs unless personnel are terminated. The most one might expect is to avoid future cost increases.

The process of reallocation is complex and should involve broad consultation. Consultation with faculty committees about reduction and reallocation tends to be most effective when faculty are asked about methods and criteria to be used rather than about specific programs or people.

From ED 260 675

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How Can Institutions Become More Flexible?

Institutional flexibility should not be equated with institutional autonomy. No *single* policy or practice discussed here has the potential to restore flexibility in an institution. In the aggregate, however, the more effective management of *all* these practices and policies can lead to greater flexibility and, if matched with a three- to five-year perspective, can result in the institution's improved performance. Administrators would be wise to implement the following suggestions:

- Develop an appropriate and comprehensive institutional strategy.
- Know the institution.
- Know what the institution values.
- Temper expectations with realism.
- Link personnel and fiscal affairs.
- Match solutions to problems.
- Manage entry to the tenure track.
- Manage positions and develop people.
- Preserve managerial prerogatives by exercising them.

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